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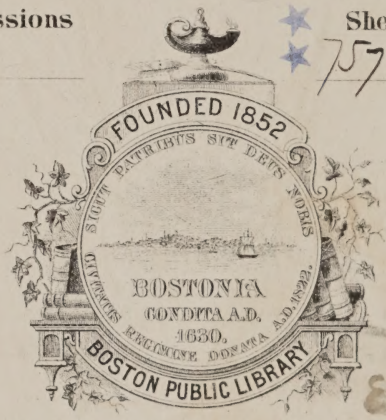

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REPORT

OF A

COMMITTEE APPOINTED AT A JOINT MEETING

OF THE

HOWARD BENEVOLENT SOCIETY, YOUNG MEN'S BENEVOLENT SOCIETY, SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF PAUPERISM, AND BOSTON EMPLOYMENT SOCIETY,

ON THE SUBJECT OF

A NEW ORGANIZATION

FOR THE

RELIEF OF PAUPERISM.

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REPORT.

The Committee appointed at a joint meeting of representatives from various benevolent societies in the city of Boston, to consider in what way a more thorough and effectual plan for the prevention and relief of pauperism may be devised, by combining the efforts of the various societies into some general and uniform system, beg leave to submit the following Report.

The subject we have under consideration is always forcing itself upon the attention of thoughtful and benevolent minds, especially in large cities. The poor we have always with us. How shall we lighten the burden of poverty where it exists? to what extent, in what manner, and under what conditions shall pecuniary aid, directly or indirectly, be given? how may the evil be anticipated, and those habits and propensities be eradicated, which are the sources of poverty? by what signs shall the deserving be distinguished from the undeserving poor? how far shall the natural impulse to relieve immediately every one who seems to be in distress, be checked and controlled? These are questions which must always be met and answered.

So far as the city of Boston is concerned, there are peculiar circumstances which bring home these considerations to us with great force. The mass of pauperism with us has increased and is increasing in much more than its natural ratio. The obvious cause of this increase is the prodigious impulse which has been given to emigration from the old

them to obtain employment." These objects are chiefly accomplished by means of an office, No. 3, Tremont Temple, in which the names of females seeking employment are entered, and through the services of a permanent agent, who, besides receiving these applications for employment, investigates, or causes to be investigated, such cases of street beggary as are referred to him, for the purpose of ascertaining the wants and claims of the parties. Reference tickets are issued to all who may wish for them, in order that street beggars, and unknown persons, calling at houses, may be immediately referred to the office, where their cases will receive prompt attention. Thus the aim of the Society is twofold,— to benefit the deserving poor by aiding them to obtain employment, and by pointing out to them the sources where immediate relief may be procured, when that is necessary ; and to discourage the manœuvres of the undeserving, by furnishing the community with the means of detecting imposition and false pretences. The Society does not afford pecuniary relief. It has a permanent fund of two thousand dollars, and further resources are derived from donations, and from an annual assessment of two dollars paid by each member.

The three societies above named, together with the various smaller associations which we have not enumerated, unquestionably accomplish much good. But the growing extent of pauperism in Boston, to which we have before alluded, has made it obvious to all persons who have considered the subject, that we need a more efficient and extensive system than that which is furnished by their isolated efforts. We want more means, more instruments, more appliances. We want more money, and more men and women. The rapidly increasing evil must be met with a corresponding increase in the energy of our remedial and preventive measures.

Besides the fact that we need an increase in the amount of our charitable efforts, we also need a change in their direction, or in the particular channels in which they move. Including the three societies we have above enumerated, there are probably some thirty or forty different institutions in Boston, laboring in various ways for the prevention or relief of the various ills, to which humanity is heir. Among them, there is little or no concert, understanding or coöperation. They must often stand in each other's way and cross each other's path. The number of such societies presents also much temptation to the indolent and designing. The bold and cunning pauper may in various ways obtain accumulated relief. The imposture that is detected in one quarter is unsuspected in another. The feigned tale of distress, which has been exposed in one place, may move the springs of compassion in another. There can be no carefully adjusted scale between the assistance rendered and the just claims of those to whom it is rendered. Even among the needy and necessitous, the clamorous and the importunate will get more than their share, and the modest and the timid, less.

What the wants of our community now require is a system which shall be local in its application, but under the control of some central moving power: which shall be a whole, with many parts; which shall have many hands, but one eye and one mind. The details of such a plan cannot be matured at once, but a beginning may be made, and experience may suggest improvements. In the meantime, your committee will venture to offer some suggestions which may serve at least as matters for consideration and discussion.

The Howard Benevolent Society, from its being an incorporated society, from its being so well known, and from

the confidence which it deservedly enjoys, would seem to your committee, a proper nucleus and commencement of this new organization. Let the other two societies, of which we have spoken, be united with this society, and let vigorous efforts be made to increase its numbers. Let the amount of subscription be placed so low that no one above absolute poverty need be prevented, on that score, from becoming a member. Let the rich be invited to contribute according to their means. Let those who are not rich be solicited to give their time and their services, which are not less important elements in the struggle with pauperism, than money.

It is desirable to start with a large society, extending over the city and embracing within its circle, men of fortune, men of benevolence and men of action, who would contribute time, money, advice and sympathy. The wards into which the city is divided suggest an obvious plan or scheme of operations. Let the wards be sub-divided into sections, more or less numerous, according to the extent of population and the wants of the inhabitants. Let each ward be under the control of a local committee, appointed by the society, who shall find a visitor for every section, whose duty it shall be to ascertain by personal examination the wants and claims of every applicant for relief. Let there be a central office for the meeting of the ward committees, and the transaction of the general business of the society. How far this office may be used as an intelligence office, in aid of such of the poor as are seeking employment, or whether it would be better to establish such an office in another place, are questions which your committee propose for consideration, without giving any decided opinion thereupon.

One immediate result of such a system would be, that

every visitor would confine his labors, exclusively, to his own section, and that all the relief given would be given in the section where the person relieved, resides. And in order to render it completely effective, it would be further necessary that every subscriber should be furnished with a directory, containing the names of the several visitors and a description of the particular section under each one's charge. In this way, whenever application was made for relief, the applicant might be dismissed with a ticket, addressed to the visitor of that particular section in which the applicant resided, and it would then become the visitor's duty to investigate his or her claims to the relief required. It is not to be supposed that by these means all street begging will be suppressed, or that some deception and imposture will not still be practised, but much would undoubtedly be gained in comparison with the present state of things.

By way of making a good beginning, it would be desirable that the ward committees should canvass thoroughly their several wards, and obtain the assistance and coöpera- of all who have anything to spare. In general, our community may be divided into three classes. First, the needy and necessitous poor, who are to some extent, wholly or in part, the objects of charity. Secondly, the thrifty and industrious poor, who have no need of assistance, who live comfortably and even lay by something for a rainy day, yet have little or nothing to bestow upon others, and are obliged to give their whole time to the particular calling by which they earn their bread; and, thirdly, all those persons who have any thing to spare, and whose condition ranges from modest competence to wealth. It is much to be desired that every person who belongs to this last class should become an annual contributor to the resources of such an enterprise as that which we have herein suggested. And

by the aid of energy and perseverance, surely this result can be accomplished.

The plan, of which we have herein briefly sketched the outlines, is not an untried experiment. A somewhat similar system is in operation in New York, and is understood to work well. It is also understood that there is a somewhat similar organization for the relief of pauperism in the city of Berlin, in Prussia. Your committee have no doubt that such a plan is entirely feasible in the city of Boston, and they have as little doubt that, if carried out with zeal and energy, it will be attended with beneficial results. But no such plan can be truly successful that has not the active and hearty coöperation of the favored classes, of those who are possessed of wealth and leisure, and those, who, from their intelligence, position and weight of character, are accustomed to give a direction to public sentiment and to take the lead in all associated action.

All which is respectfully submitted.

GEO. S. HILLARD, Chairman.

Boston, May 21, 1850.